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ABSTRACT

The orientation program for new students at the University of Maryland, College Park, provides sessions for students who have secured on-campus housing, students who have secured off-campus housing, and students who are seeking housing. Topics covered in the latter session (the "housing hunters" session) include: (1) prioritizing personal housing needs; (2) exploring temporary options (for those on the waiting list for on-campus housing); (3) exploring the variety of off-campus alternatives; (4) computing living costs; (5) understanding state laws regarding leases and security deposits; and (6) determining the best times of the year for house-hunting. (DC)

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Housing hunters:

An orientation session for housing seekers off-campus

By Barbara Jacoby

New students who are seeking off-campus housing have special needs during the orientation period. As a part of the one- or two-day orientation program at the University of Maryland, College Park, students choose to attend one of three simultaneous sessions which comprise the "Living End" component. Students with confirmed contracts for on-campus housing attend the "resident" session; students who will be commuting from home or who have already secured off-campus housing attend the "commuter" session; and students who are either on the waiting list for on-campus housing and-or who are seeking off-campus housing attend the "housing hunters" session.

An outline of the material presented at UMCP's "housing hunters" orientation session may assist other institutions in planning similar programs for the needs of their new students. The session with a slightly different focus, is suitable for presentation to parents as part of a parent orientation program.

HOUSING HUNTERS ORIENTATION SESSION

1. Choosing a place to live is a matter of personal tastes and needs. In order to increase the number of housing alternatives and to make your search quicker and easier, it is important for you to remain flexible. Many students begin their search by prioritizing their housing needs. Some considerations are:
   - —How much can I afford?
   - —What are my transportation needs?
   - —Do I need furniture?
   - —Do I need to be near shopping?
   - —Do I need my own room?

2. If you are on the waiting list for a room in the campus residence halls, there are a variety of temporary options available:
   - —commute from home; carpool if long distance
   - —move in with a friend or relative who lives close to campus
   - —check into a room in a hotel or boarding house; cheaper if you have roommates in the same situation as you
   - —rent an apartment or a room in a private home with a short-term lease or no lease at all

3. If you are interested in off-campus housing only, the alternatives include:
   - —fraternity or sorority house; usually requires at least one semester lease, boarding and social dues
   - —room in a private home; usually no lease required; part or all of rent sometimes exchanged for household chores
   - —room in a student home; usually no lease required
   - —apartment; vacant units usually required one-year lease and minimum income

4. In computing the costs of living off-campus, consider the following in addition to rent:
   - —utilities (may be included in rent)
   - —deposits
   - —phone service
   - —transportation
   - —food

These costs can be reduced by sharing them with a roommate.

5. It is important that you understand the state laws regarding leases and security deposits. A lease is a legal contract or agreement between a landlord and a tenant which states the conditions under which an apartment may be made available to a tenant. Because leases contain all the rights and obligations of both landlord and tenant, students should carefully scrutinize and fully understand all of the provisions before signing their lease.

All leases should be in duplicate with a copy given to the tenant upon signing. Be sure to hold on to a copy of the lease as well as a copy of all pertinent documents and correspondence until the termination of tenancy.

A security deposit is any money, including a prepayment of monthly rent, given to the landlord at the onset of tenancy to protect the landlord against damages to the premises or non-payment of rent. This money is to be returned to the tenant within a specific number of days of the termination of his lease. Many tenants have serious problems recovering all or part of their security deposits. To protect themselves from dishonest landlords, students should become familiar with the existing laws. (Specifics for the state in which the institution is located should be included here.)

6. Experience has shown that the best times to search for housing are during the months of July and August for the fall semester, December and January for the spring semester, and April and May for the summer sessions. Usually there is little chance of securing housing until thirty to forty-five days before it is needed. This is because landlords typically receive vacancy notices at the very end or beginning of a month for the following month.

Regardless of the type of housing desired or the time of year, a carefully planned three-to-four-day search usually results in locating suitable housing. In spite of the fact that more housing becomes available at the start of each semester, you should not rule out the possibility of securing housing early. A visit to the Off-Campus Housing Service would at least familiarize you with the housing-hunting process and the area, making a later search easier.

(A description of the institution's services for students seeking off-campus housing should end the presentation.)

7. Don't forget to leave plenty of time for questions!

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